

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	12 December 2022
Lead Officer	Stuart Millington, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Environment)
Contact Officer	Anthony T Jones, Head of Operations and East Area
Subject	Biodiversity and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report addresses North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority's) compliance with section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It also provides information on proposed future planning and reporting of actions by the Authority in relation to improving biodiversity within its estate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Authority is required to plan for, and report on its actions to improve biodiversity within its estate. This report presents a draft Biodiversity Report and Action Plan 2022 for approval to publish on the Authority's website by the end of December in accordance with section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Members are asked to approve the contents of the attached Biodiversity Report and Action Plan 2022 to be incorporated into a publication on the Authority's website before the end of December 2022.

BACKGROUND

4. Biodiversity relates to the variety of life found on earth. The economy and people's health and well-being depend on healthy, resilient ecosystems for food, clean water and air, raw materials, energy and protection against hazards such as flooding and climate change.
5. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 placed a duty on public authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the proper exercise of their functions.

6. In 2015 the Welsh Government launched a Nature Recovery Action Plan aimed at reversing the decline of biodiversity in Wales. This Plan set out how Wales would deliver the commitments of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity through short term actions up to 2020 and as longer-term commitments beyond 2020.
7. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 put in place seven well-being goals for Wales that public bodies listed in the Act must work to achieve. One of those goals relates to a 'resilient Wales', making Wales 'a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change'.
8. In 2016 public authorities in Wales became subject to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the 'section 6 duty').
9. The section 6 duty requires public authorities – including fire and rescue authorities – to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and, in so doing, to promote the resilience of ecosystems.
10. Public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into all their activities including business planning, policies, programmes and projects. Specifically, each public authority must publish a plan setting out how it proposes to comply with the section 6 duty, and a report describing what it has already done in this regard. The first such retrospective report was published in 2019, with subsequent reports due every three years thereafter.

INFORMATION

11. The Service has been working to an action plan for managing the Authority's premises in ways that enhance the biodiversity of its estate by addressing the six objectives listed in the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales. Further details are provided in the attached draft Biodiversity Report and Action Plan (please refer to Appendix 1).
12. In addition to this, the Authority's draft objectives for 2022/23 include an intention to develop and adopt an Environmental Strategy. Future biodiversity action planning would therefore fall within the remit of this broader strategy.

13. The draft text of the Authority's second section 6 biodiversity report is contained within Appendix 1. Subject to the Authority's approval, this will be incorporated into a report for publication on the Authority's website by the statutory deadline of the end of December 2022.

14. Although reporting against the section 6 duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 is required only every three years, more frequent reporting can in future be incorporated into the Authority's Annual Performance Assessments.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Direct implication for agreeing the steps towards meeting one of the Authority's long-term improvement and well-being objectives
Budget	The action plan items are already accounted for within existing budgets
Legal	Supports compliance with improvement planning, well-being and environment legislation
Staffing	No known impact on staffing levels
Equalities/Human Rights/Welsh Language	The impact of specific actions on these aspects will be assessed at the appropriate point in their development
Risks	Reduces the risks of legal non-compliance and of failing to budget and plan appropriately